when the growing population demanded another slice of the hunting grounds, Robertson was the man to make the deal and he went about it in a calm and business way, and if the Indians would not give the right-of-way or sell the land, their rights were respected, and Tennessee has a surprisingly clean record as to seizing land belonging to Indians.

CHAPTER VIII

Incidents Concerning General Averell. Natural History Notes.

The Droop Mountain battle has brought some recollections of incidents. Averell said that there was a local guide to show the way around to take the Confederates in the rear, and that Col. Moore found him untrustworthy and that he traveled by the sound of cannon and the direction that the flying pickets took when they were dislodged by the advancing troops. In the last week I have heard three men mentioned as to the identity of this guide. It will probably never be settled for it was a matter that would be kept dark for the first years anyway, on account of the division in the sentiments of the people.

Averell camped the night before the battle along the road between Mill Point and Hillsboro, in the fields now owned by M. J. McNeel and the Captain Edgar estate. In plain view of his camp was the large brick house the home of Col. Paul McNeel, the member for Pocahontas county in the convention at Richmond that declared for secession. Col. McNeel was a leader in the county at the time.

That particular day in the fall of 1863, as the two armies faced each other all the men folks in the Levels were hiding out to escape being taken prisoner, and there were no others at the mansion except women, children and slaves. Then Averell did a very graceful thing that causes him to be remembered by that family with gratitude. He sent three young gentlemen, officers in his army, and they appeared at the house, and said that they had been sent by Gen. Averell, and that they were to say that he had heard that it was the home of an elder in the Presbyterian church, and that he wanted them to know, that he, Averell was also an elder in the Presbyterian church and that they should be under no apprehension of any harm coming to them. The officer added that they were to stay with them to guard the house, and they were guests until the next morning when they moved into battle.

J. C. Wiley, a Confederate veteran still living in this county, was present at Droop Mountain, and he says that when the break came that he with other soldiers buried a brass cannon in the woods and that he intends some day to go there and see if he cannot locate it and dig it up, and he believes that he will be able to find it.

The late A. M. McLaughlin was in that battle and he was retiring in some haste through the woods alone when he came on a Union soldier who had been wounded and who was trying to shoot him. The soldier was in a sitting position with his back against a log but whenever he would lift his rifle to aim the weight of the gun would cause him to fall for-

ward and the gun come to the ground. Whereupon the soldier would use the rifle to push himself back in a sitting position, attempt to raise the rifle and fall forward again. The retreating Confederate seized the rifle and disarmed his adversary and took the gun and bent it around a sapling and went on. And after this story had become a household classic for some years, Mr. McLaughlin on his way back from Lewisburg searched the place and found the gun and brought it in, showing a rusted ruined fire-arm bent in the manner described.

Averell says that when he got to the White Sulphur Springs, after the battle of Droop Mountain, he recovered the wounded he had left there at the battle of Rocky Gap, or the battle of Dry Creek. But he did not get one of his men back without a protest. The soldiers stopped at one house where there was a convalscent soldier boy, and they were confronted by a beautiful red headed girl, and she said, "You can't have that soldier. He is mine. I captured him, and nursed him, and made him well, and he is going to stay with me. He is mine."

But they took him along with them.

Captain John K. Thompson, of Mason county, was a Confederate in that action on Droop Mountain. He says that the fire was the hottest there that he ever experienced and he was a soldier of long and fierce fighting in the war. It was there that he lost an eye. It seems that the bullet came so close to his face without touching him that the eye was drawn from the socket. Captain Thompson was afterwards Republican State chairman of West Virginia, and one of the leading men of West Virginia.

At the time of the battle, Claiborne McNeil, of Buckeye, a Confederate soldier of two years hard fighting, was at home on an indefinite leave of absence. Hearing the battle begin he climbed to a height near his home, Bridgers Notch, and saw the battle, on one side of which was engaged his brothers, Captain Jim McNeil, a Confederate officer, and on the other side, his half brother, Alfred McKeever.

After the battle, Alfred McKeever knowing that his half-brother, Captain Jim McNeil, had been engaged was filled with apprehension as to his safety, and searched among the Confederate dead and wounded, and then passed by the long line of prisoners, who were strung out along the pike. Presently he saw the Captain and rushed up to him with outstretched hand, saying how glad he was that he was alive and unhurt. But Captain McNeill was filled with the bitterness of defeat. He folded his arms and thus he spoke: "I am glad to know, Alfred, that you too are alive and well, but Alfred we are not shaking hands today."

One Confederate veteran in speaking of the dynamic effect of fear, says that it is possible in such a condition to leap Greenbrier River, which would mean perhaps a hundred feet at its narrowest place at the foot of Droop Mountain. Anyway, he says, that immediately after the battle he found himself on the east bank of the river with dry feet, and the only way that he can account for it is that he jumped the stream in his retreat.

In the spring of 1864, the Union troops called at my Grandfather Price's at the old ancestral hall at Marlinton. Averell was proceeding to police the country and to do up his work in this part of his moral vineyard. The first intimation that the family had was the sound of the wooden latch of the gate at the road, falling. They looked out and the whole country from there to the bridge was blue. There were four Confederate soldiers in uniform in the house, James Henry Price, J. C. Price, J. Woods Price and David D. Kinnison. They ran in a southerly direction. Kinnison fell down and was captured and sent to prison. J. Woods Price was pursued to the big sycamore that stood at the mouth of Kees Run and dodged behind this, and one Union soldier came that far and as he came around the tree, the Confederate shot at him and cut a furrow across his brow, whereupon the Union soldier went back and Woods Price escaped. J. C. Price and J. H. Price took to the river, the river being in a state of flood. J. H. Price got across and had made good his escape, but J. C. Price was shot in the thigh and it looked like he might drown and J. H. Price swam back to assist him, but before he could reach the wounded man, the Union soldier that had fired the shot, a very pleasant young gentleman from the State of New York, went into the river and brought out his game. Whereupon J. C. Price was left at home to recover of a flesh wound and J. H. Price was made a prisoner and spent the rest of the period of the war in an Ohio prison. He was turned out at the cessation of the war, and without a cent in his pocket, and walked the hundreds of miles home, and that cured him of traveling. He was wont to remark: "Always have a little money in your pocket." His stories were the delight of the children. He had seen much service; been under fire where "rifle bullets fell like big drops of rain before a thunder storm", been captured, and spent a year in prison, but it had so happened that during the whole period he had never been called upon to fire. "In the war four years and never busted a cap." He was a noted rifle shot, too. He had marched, and countermarched, and endured all sorts of hardships, but it so happened that he never was in a firing line, and he did not propose to magnify his service by intimation of great slaughter.

In 1887, Gen. Averell came to West Virginia and went over the scene of his activities in this and Randolph county with H. F. Cromer.

There seems to be some confusion as to the road that Col. Moore's men took in the flank movement. Some say that he went clear around and came to the Jacox road and from there came into the pike at its junction on top of Droop mountain, but I think they turned at the top of the mountain between Hillsboro and Lobelia and came along on the crest of the ridge.

The strategy of the Confederate general consisted in investing the eminence and leaving the river road wide open to Averell so that he could have passed on towards the south; but if he had tried to do so he would have had a long thin line winding through and across deep ravines, and he would have been cut to pieces from the heights above. He gave battle and won it.